SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, KOMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE
DECEMBER 2014

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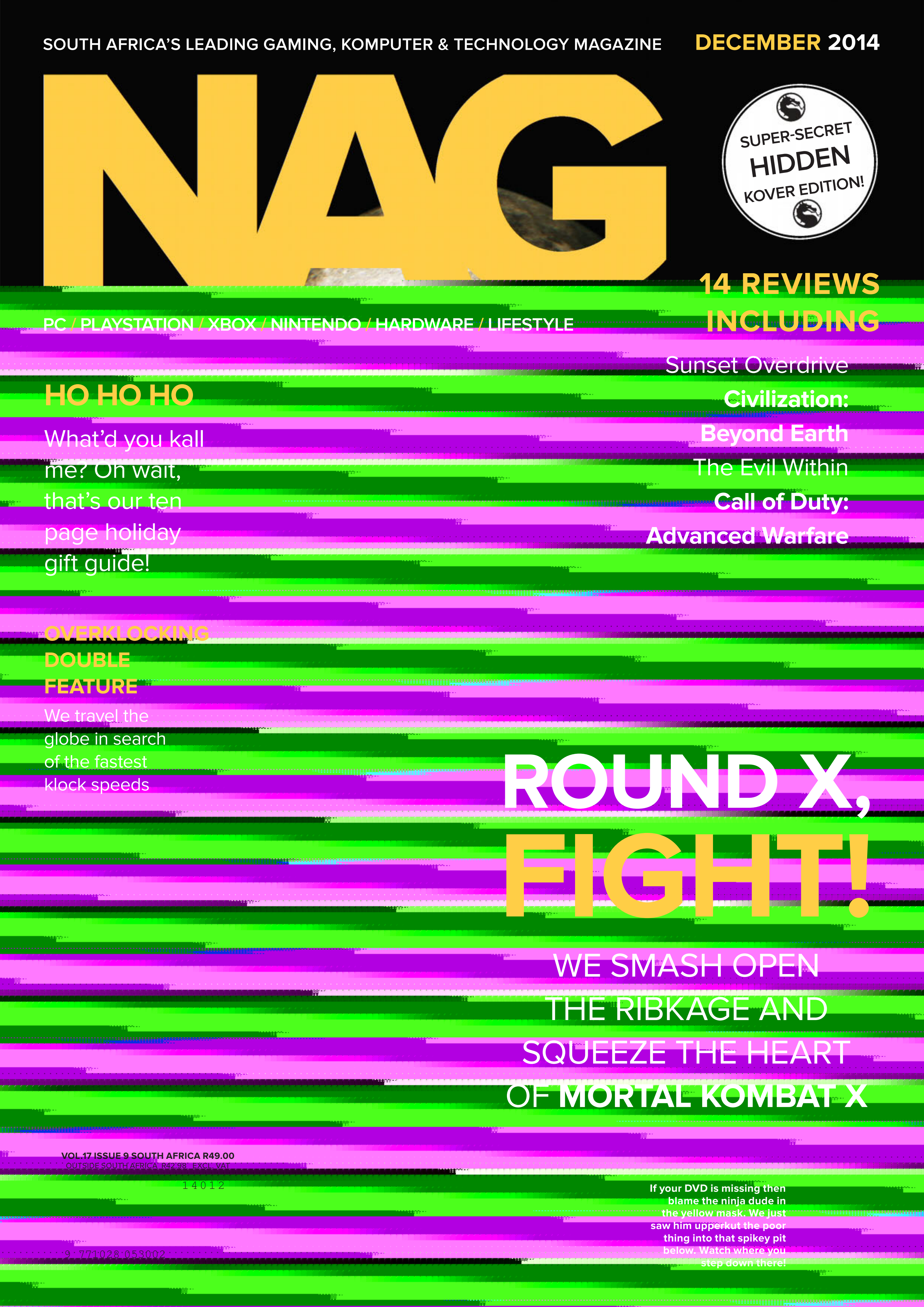

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PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO / HARDWARE / LIFESTYLE

14 REVIEWS INCLUDING

Sunset Overdrive
Civilization: Beyond Earth
The Evil Within
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare

HO HO HO

What'd you kall me? Oh wait, that's our ten page holiday gift guide!

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ROUND X, FIGHT!

WE SMASH OPEN THE RIBKAGE AND SQUEEZE THE HEART OF **MORTAL KOMBAT X**

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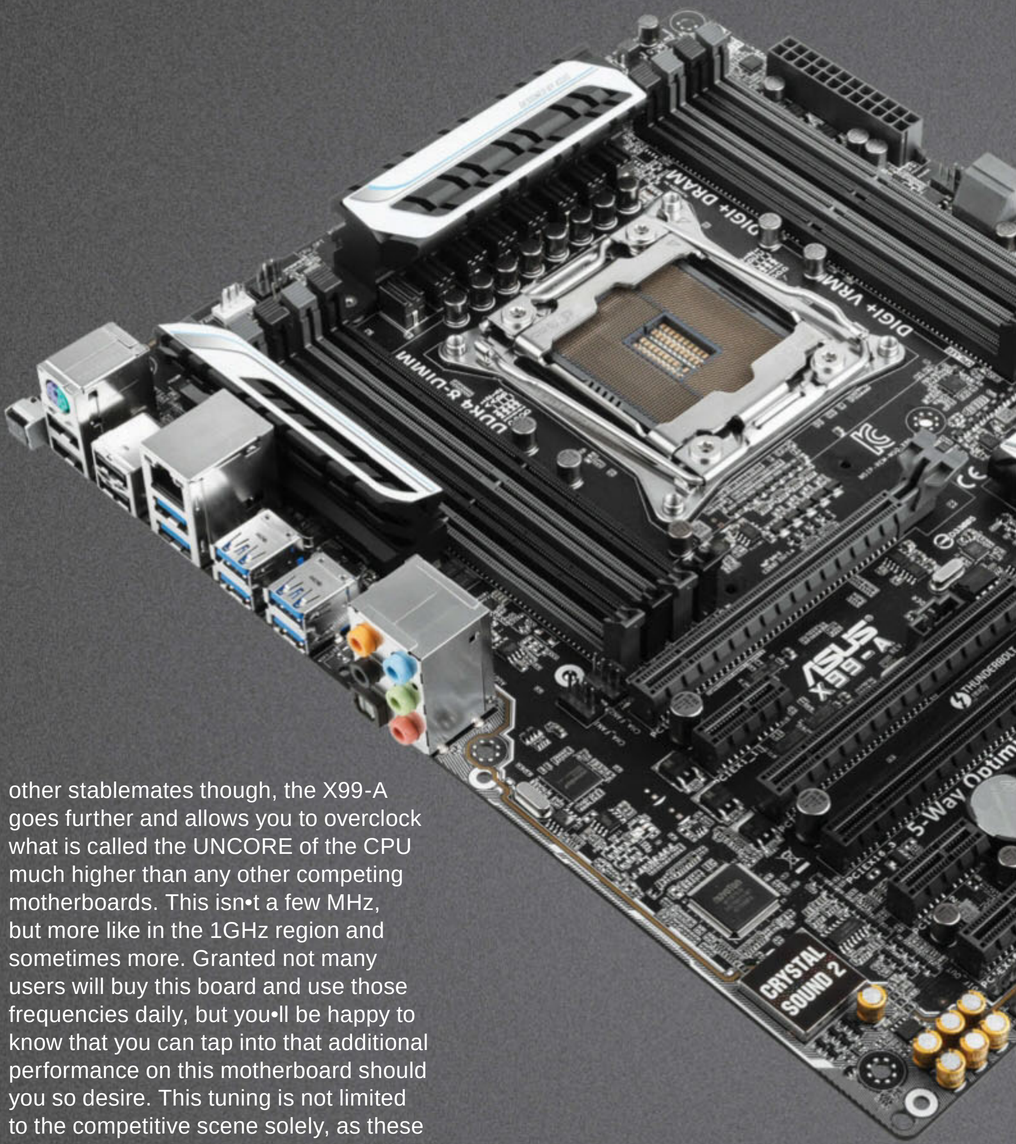
If your DVD is missing then blame the ninja dude in the yellow mask. We just saw him upperkut the poor thing into that spikey pit below. Watch where you step down there!

ASUS X99-A

Website / www.asus.com ERP /R3,999 Supplier / ASUS

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X99
MEMORY	8x 280-pin DDR5
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 2011-V3
EXPANSION	4x PCIe 16X, 2x PCIe 1X
SIZE	ATX



There's no denying that the X99 platform is a powerful one. It's expensive, but it is immensely more current than the aged X79 chipset it has replaced. Power users from a performance and features point of view have never had it this good.

We had hoped that with the X99 chipset it would allow all vendors to undo the great tragedy that was the vast majority of X79 motherboards. Officially, the only worthwhile X79 motherboards were from ASUS and a single offering from EVGA in the form of the X79 Dark. Everything else was nothing short of disappointing and most of the boards just didn't work properly at all.

With the X99 chipset, most vendors have come to the party prepared, but again ASUS has managed to up the ante and, even this early in the game, are ahead of the competition. Do not mistake this as saying there aren't any competent X99 motherboards on the market from competitors. There are and many are good boards, but the ASUS range is just better. This isn't from a features perspective, at least not in non-overclocking features. It's literally in memory compatibility. You see, the thing is that technically, all boards adhere to the DDR4 spec and Intel CPUs which only call for 2,133MHz compatibility. Thus, everything else above that is optional. In reality though, that is hardly a frequency that warrants switching to DDR4. You may as well make use of very early DDR3 modules and platforms. No, what we want as power users, enthusiasts and gamers is the best performance possible and that means speeds at the very least above 2,666MHz.

The ASUS X99-A, like its brethren, not only achieves this, but will easily run 3,200MHz sets out the box. A feat that thus far only the Rampage V Extreme and less than a handful of others can claim. Every other motherboard needs manual tuning and some won't even reach that memory speed. Like with the other stablemates though, the X99-A goes further and allows you to overclock what is called the UNCORE of the CPU much higher than any other competing motherboards. This isn't a few MHz, but more like in the 1GHz region and sometimes more. Granted not many users will buy this board and use those frequencies daily, but you'll be happy to know that you can tap into that additional performance on this motherboard should you so desire. This tuning is not limited to the competitive scene solely, as these differences are apparent when using regular air cooling as well.

Now, if you match the high memory frequency compatibility and the impressive UNCORE overclocking, you end up with a motherboard that is easily the fastest we've tested. The most intriguing thing about this is that this is the budget board from the entire ASUS range. Thus you can imagine how much better the DELUXE and most certainly the Rampage V board is. For those who may want to exploit this advantage the ASUS motherboards have, be advised that on the X99-A, there is only one 12V CPU connector. Given just how much current the 5960X CPU can draw, the system may trip the PSU which, if it's a good PSU will register as a power surge. There is a way around this but it requires a dual 12V CPU connector plug, which you would then plug into this motherboard. GIGABYTE for instance provide this connector on their SOC-Force motherboards, but it does not ship with the X99-A. On the Rampage V Extreme, this plug isn't necessary because it has two CPU 12V power connectors, thus allowing the system to load multiple 12V lines simultaneously.

That entire aspect of the board aside, ASUS has been steadily tweaking their UEFI interface since its introduction. It's seen some improvements and as it stands

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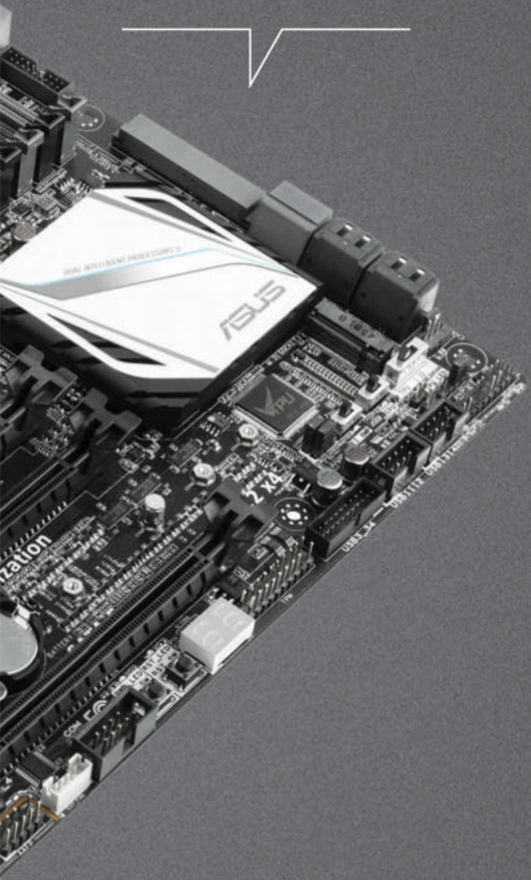
DIGI+ DRAM
DIGI+ VRM
ASUS X99-A
CRYSTAL SOUND 2
SATA Express
M.2 x4



it's the smoothest it's been. It's not an HD or perhaps 1080p capable UEFI like you have on the GIGABYTE motherboards for instance, but it does have the smoothest animation and easily the most well packed features list when compared to the competition.

For instance the X99-A allows you to not only turn off CPU cores, which all motherboards lately are capable of, but it goes further and allows you to pick exactly which cores you want to disable. Thus if you have two particularly hot cores for example, you will be able to disable them and leave the rest operating normally. This is a feature that has so far not made its way into any other motherboard, at least outside of the ASUS offerings.

Other than that you'll find the usual UEFI options, plenty of profiles and the ability to capture screenshots as well. Configuring fans on this motherboard has also proved to be simple and intuitive. The UEFI can test your respective fan and find its limits, thus allowing you to adjust its heat response curve accordingly. It's not a matter of just plugging in a fan and setting a speed, but each fan can be tested separately and adjusted appropriately for its capabilities.

Out of the UEFI/BIOS options screen you'll find that this isn't a motherboard where ASUS spent a lot of money on the components. They are not cheap by any means, but next to Sabertooth and ROG products, there isn't anything worth highlighting. It has all the basics, such as ClrCMOS, MemOK, power, reset and POST code LED. In addition, there's three switches for TPU versions (I and II), EPU and easy XMP. Once again, the ASUS board allows you to flash the UEFI/BIOS without needing a CPU at all using USB BIOS flashback.

The audio part is acceptable, offering similar quality to the plethora of ALC1150 codec based solutions on the market. Not surprising because it uses that very same codec backed up by an op-amp and Nichicon gold capacitors. It'll do just fine but will hardly blow you away. If you're serious about your audio you'll definitely want to invest in the ASUS Phoebus or any other discrete audio solution.

For an entry level X99 motherboard, it isn't cheap. Then again, there aren't any cheap X99 motherboards. The platform is inherently expensive and such prices should be expected. The X99-A does, for the money, give you plenty, perhaps in many ways more than what other vendors provide for a much higher financial investment. The price difference between this motherboard and the DELUXE on our side of the world isn't as big as it is in other countries, thus, you may consider the DELUXE version, given just how much more it offers, including Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity to list just a couple.

Still, if you're not able to stretch your budget and want a motherboard that can pretty much do it all, you can't go wrong with the ASUS X99-A. It's a wonderful board and for the price, it'll be hard to beat.

- Neo Sibeko

8 The ASUS X99-A is the cheapest in the family but it more than matches many competitor's high-end offerings.

PLUS / Wonderful UEFI/BIOS / Some overclocking features / Great memory compatibility

MINUS / Not for extreme overclocking / Average audio controller

3,200MHz

16-18-18-36 (XMP 2.0)

1.35V

10

PLUS / /
/

MINUS / /